The Quiet Ego: A Longitudinal Perspective on Change and Flourishing in Emerging Adulthood

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Introduction

The Quiet Ego (QE) is a relatively new construct in positive psychology. In contrast to a noisier ego that is self-centered, defensive, and validation-seeking, the quiet ego is characterized by "an equanimity of mind that acknowledges the good and the bad in one's observations, compassion in one's view of others (interpersonally and collectively), curiosity to learn alternative points of view, and a long-term perspective on the self and others with a mind to facilitate their development" (Bauer & Weatherbie, 2023). The quiet ego is composed of four components:

Aristotle first defined eudaimonia as the highest human good relating to happiness, flourishing, and living a life of purpose. Quiet ego is positively associated with measures of human flourishing (Bauer & Weatherbie, 2023) and balanced thinking about self and others in ways that foster healthy self and social functioning (Wayment et al., 2015). While there is research on the validity of the Quiet Ego Scale and effectiveness of QE training in improving emotional intelligence, there is no longitudinal evidence on normative changes in QE in emerging adulthood.

Current Study

Question 1: To what extent does the quiet ego increase or decrease over time in our sample of emerging adults?

Question 2: Do such increases and decreases in quiet ego correlate with measures of flourishing, including increased psychological well-being?

Methods

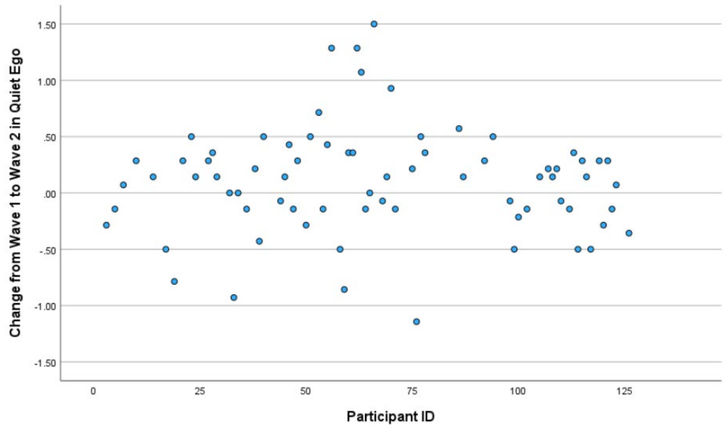
Participants: 75 (female=65.8%, *M*age=19.9, 18-25 yrs) college students were recruited from participant pools at Weber State University and Franklin & Marshall College. The majority (75%) of participants reported their ethnicity to be White (51%), Hispanic (13%), or Asian (11%).

Procedure: Participants came into the lab twice (~6 months apart) and completed a Qualtrics survey (measures below). Participation took ~45 minute and was compensated with course credit (Wave 1) or $40 (Wave 2). At Wave 2, participants also wrote their response to the "biggest life challenge" component of the Life Script Interview (McAdams, 2001).

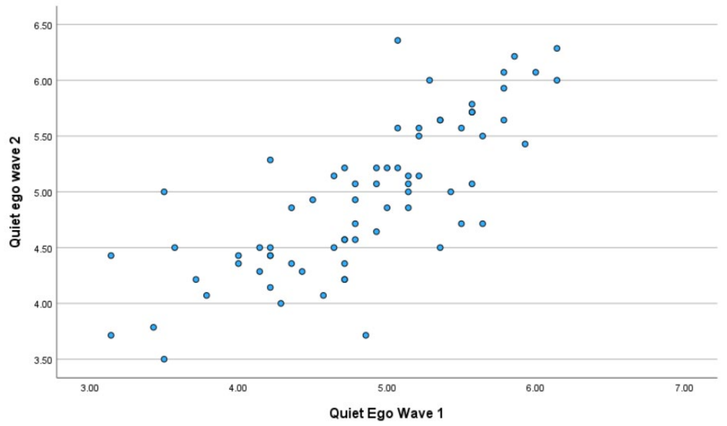
Measures & Coding: Participants completed the Quiet Ego Scale (Wayment et al., 2015); 7-pt Likert scale with higher scores reflecting a quieter ego. Ryff (1989) Psychological Well-Being Scale; 7-pt Likert scale with higher scores reflecting greater purpose in life & self-acceptance. Marlowe-Crown Social Desirability Scale (1960). Future Life Script Narrative, Life Story Interview (McAdams, 2001). The first three authors reliably coded narratives for growth (Lilgendahl & McAdams, 2011) using typical methods (Syed & Nelson, 2015, *I.C.C.'s* ranged from .81 to .98). A score of 1 = no growth, whereas a score of 4 =strong themes of growth.

Figures and Results

Question 1: We calculated a QE change score by subtracting QE W1 from W2 so that positive scores reflected an increase in QE over time.



A paired samples t-test revealed an increase in QE scores of 0.10 from W1 (*M*=4.85) to W2 (*M*=4.95) that is trending toward significance (one tailed p= .037; two-tailed p=.074), with a small effect size (*d*=0.21).



Correlation Table

Variable Names	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5
1. QE Wave 1	4.85	.08	—	.77**	.42**	.33**	.23*
2. QE Wave 2	4.95	.08	.77**	—	.41**	.35**	.11
3. Self-Acceptance	4.61	1.18	.42**	.41**	—	.73**	.22
4. Purpose in Life	4.96	.88	.33**	.35**	.73**	—	.02
5. Narrative Growth	2.35	1	.23*	.11	.23	.02	—

Note: **p < .05, **p < .01*

Question 2: QE scores at Wave 1 were positively correlated with measures of psychological well-being (i.e., self-acceptance, purpose in life) at Wave 2. QE scores at Wave 1, but not Wave 2, were positively correlated with narrative growth.

Conclusion

Whereas prior research has largely assessed the quiet ego at a single point in time, this study explored stability and change in quiet ego longitudinally in emerging adulthood. For the most part, participants' QE scores were fairly high (*M*=4.85) and slightly increased (*M*=4.95) over six-months. Participants' scores on self-acceptance (*M*=4.53) and purpose in life (*M*=4.88) were also fairly high and slightly increased (*M*s=4.61 & 4.96, respectively) over six-months. In addition, QE scores at W1 and W2 were negatively correlated with scores on our socially desirability scale (rs (73)= -0.26 & -0.23, ps<.05, respectively). While self-report measures of QE may be too blunt to fully capture QE, our data reveal that self-reports of QE do not reflect socially desirable responding.

This study also explored whether increases in QE in emerging adulthood correlate with measures of flourishing, including increased psychological well-being and narrative growth. Findings revealed that QE scores at Wave 1 were positively correlated with measures of psychological well-being at Wave 2 and positively correlated with narrative growth. Higher QE scores at Wave 1 predicted higher self-acceptance and purpose in life, as well as stronger themes of growth in response to participants' biggest life challenge.

This study extends previous research by exploring the quiet ego and its correlates longitudinally in emerging adulthood. Findings reveal that quiet ego scores 1) are fairly high but somewhat increase, and 2) predict various forms of flourishing six months later in emerging adulthood.

Poster available here:

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